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SUBJECT: OHAL MENTALITY, IF NOT NAME, PERSISTS IN
TURKEY'S SOUTHEAST

REF: (A) ANKARA 8447; (B) ANKARA 6116

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Although the GOT lifted the State of Emergency in the Southeast (OHAL) November 30, vestiges of OHAL rule and a siege mentality among security personnel persist. Kurds in the region continue to wait for implementation of promised cultural freedoms, including the right to teach the Kurdish language and broadcast in Kurdish. This "wait-and-see" mentality cannot be maintained indefinitely, and as time passes, disappointment, and belief that meaningful reform will not occur, grow. END SUMMARY.

THE ROAD TO DIYARBAKIR

2. (SBU) For years, four security checkpoints guarded the road from Bingol to Diyarbakir. According to Bingol Mayor Feyzullah Karaaslan, people still are routinely stopped, questioned about travel, and asked to produce identification. Karaaslan said he continues to be subjected to significant unnecessary delays on this route, which persist long after the ending of OHAL in Bingol in 1997. Passenger vehicles, trucks, tractors, and buses are all regularly stopped. In the case of trucks, identification and cargo manifest must be presented. For buses, typically the driver must present his identification and license.

3. (SBU) Poloff was stopped for 20 minutes at one checkpoint on the Bingol-Diyarbakir road, and questioned about purpose of travel, parents' names, previous travel, length of time in Turkey, and point of arrival in Turkey. When asked why traffic jandarma had such questions, they replied "for the safety of the people of Diyarbakir. How do we know you are who you say you are?" This, of course, despite the fact they were holding a diplomatic ID issued by the MFA and could see the vehicle's diplomatic plates. At all checkpoints in the three-hour drive, identification must be presented and destination given.

THE PERSISTENCE OF OHAL

4. (SBU) The State of Emergency lives on, both mentally and bureaucratically, and there have been press reports alleging the GOT plans to create a "Coordinating Governorate" for the Southeast (see reftel A). Whether true or not, such reports raise doubts about the GOT's future plans for the region. Gov. Aydinler's OHAL administration continues to exist in Diyarbakir, though local political contacts indicated Aydinler has been given approximately two months to close down and account for all funding.

5. (SBU) Provincial governors with whom Poloff met in Bingol, Elazig, and Malatya all said they are confident that security in the region can be maintained post OHAL. Bingol Deputy Governor Ibrahim Suha Karaboran said all
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concerns which OHAL oversaw could now competently be handled on the provincial level. Tunceli Governor Mustafa Erkal concurred, saying that security issues had taken a back seat to development and employment concerns, and did not require super-provincial authority. (NOTE: Provincial governors have long found their authority circumscribed by the OHAL administration, and have an interest in defending their

security-based prerogatives.)

A KURD BY ANY OTHER NAME

16. (SBU) A raft of cultural-freedom laws was passed as part of the August EU-harmonization package (reftel B). However, implementation, both in the form of regulation and mentality, has yet to occur. No Kurdish-language television broadcasts, radio programs, or courses are yet in place. Moreover, Kurds continue to chafe under Birth Registry Law number 1587, which outlaws "names which do not fit Turkey's national culture, moral rules, customs or traditions, or which harm the general public." This law is often used to ban traditional Kurdish names; the most recent case in which a parent was charged with violation of this law was on November 126. In March, 25 Batman city council members were acquitted on charges of separatist propaganda for renaming local streets using Kurdish names.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) With or without OHAL, a restrictive mentality persists among government and security officials in the Southeast. Promised reforms and expanded freedoms are still pending. Kurds' expectations have been raised by small liberalizing measures (like the increased availability of Kurdish music on cassette and compact disc), but could be easily dashed if promised reforms are not followed through. End comment.
HOLTZ